

Métroux—Ethnology of Easter Island

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All traditions of the seclusion of children rest on an authentic custom, the memory of which has not been entirely lost. Both De Langle (130, vol. 1, p. 81) and members of González' expedition (90, p. 40) mention having seen huts where children were apparently secluded, guarded by adults.

FEAST HOUSE

A large house (*hare nui*) was built before a feast (*koro*) where young people gathered to play and sing. They lived in more or less promiscuity, and tradition says that they had many opportunities to make love and to have sexual intercourse. Foundations were laid for many marriages during the feast, but as evidenced by numerous tales, the feast houses were not for the young people only but for all invited guests. Routledge was told that the young people who shared in the dances had to be "white" (*ritorito*) which in Easter Island is almost synonymous with "fine." Routledge (194, p. 235) writes: "In connection with some or all of the *kaunga* (dancing grounds) there was a house where the party remained indoors for a long time previous to the dances, in order 'to get their complexions,' a touch which shows that a white skin was admired." In traditional records of *koro* some confusion may have arisen between the seclusion before the feast and the actual *koro*.

INITIATION RITES

When the children between the ages of 13 and 15 years were submitted to seclusion, rites were celebrated which had perhaps the character of a consecration. Little is known about these ceremonies, and their significance is obscure. The boys and girls who went through the ceremonies were termed *poki take* and *poki manu* (bird children). Routledge (194, p. 266) was told that the *take* ceremonies were dropped about 30 years before the arrival of the missionaries and that no living person had attended such a ceremony. The oldest man in the village when Routledge was there stated that the *take* ceremony was intended for adults and that the father performed the rites when the son was born. My information was obtained from Viriamo through Tepano. She said that boys and girls were sent to Motu-nui when they were 13 years of age. They sojourned on the island for three months, living in separate caves. Food was taken to them in canoes, and ornaments (*tahonga*, wooden balls) and special breechcloths of tapa called *hami mama* were sent them by their parents. The children were given red and white ocher (*kira* and *marikuru*) for the painting of their bodies. White bands were painted around the arms and feet, concentric white circles on the back at the level of the waist, and two white rings on the buttocks.

The ceremony following seclusion was called *te manu mo ta poki* (the bird for the child). I could discover no better explanation of this feast and its benefit than that given by Routledge, which is vague and probably incor-

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root is used for burns, and a species of nightshade is used as a vulnerary remedy." Sea water is drunk as a purgative. The introduced verbena (*peruviana*) is used as a remedy against leprosy. Knoche (123, p. 195) mentions a decoction of ti as a remedy but he does not say for what it is used and modern natives know nothing about its medicinal use. They rely mostly on European remedies.

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RECREATION

FEASTS

Modern Easter Islanders rely entirely on feasts to break the monotony of their lives. Formerly, frequent wars gave a thrill to existence, and when peace reigned festivities were continuous, according to Eyraud. Every lineage or village considered it a duty to entertain in turn the other villages or lineages. As soon as a feast was finished in one place a new one began at another point of the island.

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The general name for feast, used in tales, is *koro* which applies also to the big house erected for festal occasions. Whatever the real meaning of *koro* might have been, the feasts were named according to their purpose, their nature, and the time of the year when they were celebrated. The main feasts which have been recorded by missionaries or mentioned in traditions are the *paina*, the *oro-outi*, the *tangata-manu* (feast of the bird-man) at Orongo, and the ordinary *koro*, including feasts to honor a parent and those given at harvest time by rich landowners. "When the crops were ripe, every plantation, whatever its products were became the subject of a feast for a village or even for several villages. Everything depended on its extension and the importance of the owner" (190, p. 428).

At every feast there was a great display of food, especially of chickens. Food was piled on stages or conical towers. It is said that feasts were often disturbed by quarrels among warriors (*mata-toa*), who demanded large contributions of food and fought for shares (190, p. 498).

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PAINA

The exact purpose and form of the *paina* feast is rather vague. Various visitors have collected widely differing accounts. But the *paina* apparently celebrated the memory of a dead parent, generally a father, and was an indirect part of the funeral duties of a son. The feast could be held soon after the death or several years later. It was always celebrated in the summer, and the right time for it was indicated by the position of the three central stars in Orion. The entire family of the deceased, especially the brothers and cousins, contributed to the expense of the ceremony. Over a period of years they raised chickens, planted extensively, and probably stored food to

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196 by the use of other substantives to indicate the nature of a particular tablet
212 (*hohau o te rangā, hohau o te pure*).

As already mentioned (p. 137), the chants associated with the tablets were
212 recited by learned men or bards called *tangata rongorongo*. Reading of the
533 tablets or chanting from them was taught in special huts, comparable to the
schools of learning (*whare wananga*) of the Maori. At Te Hare-titaha in
872 Anakena I was shown stone curbs which were supposed to be remains of the
most famous school for *rongorongo* men. There were similar houses in other
districts. The atmosphere and the methods in these houses of learning were
described by some informants on the authority of old men now dead. Un-
fortunately these traditions are colored by details of the missionary school
system:

[346] The school houses were open sheds with thatched roofs. In the morning the children
waited outside the house until they were told by the teacher to enter. To the teacher's
salute of *mairs* they answered *hohora*. Each student knelt before a flat stone (*mara
rango*), which served as a writing desk. The assistant instructor (*te pahu*) counted the
children to find out whether any were missing. The teacher started the lesson by reciting
[523] a prayer from a tablet. Then the children were taught to make string figures, each of
which was associated with a chant that they must memorize. There were chants for love,
for the dead, for saving people from dying, for addressing noblemen, and for the multipli-
cation of birds and fish.

[824] Banana leaves were used as copy books and on them the pupils practiced the engrav-
ing of signs with a sharp bone from the frigate bird (*makohe*). Te Haha said the copy
books were sheaths from the banana trunk (194, p. 214).

According to Routledge, Te Haha was taught by King Nga-ara, but Charli Teao,
the nephew of Te Haha, told me that his uncle had been trained by Taki, another uncle
of Charli. Taki had been taught by Ngangiriva. Te Haha described King Nga-ara as
"holding a tablet in one hand and swaying from side to side as he recited. Besides giving
instruction, he inspected the candidates prepared by other professors, who were generally
their own sons; he looked at their *hohau* and made them read, on which he either passed
them, clapping if they did well, or turned them back. Their sponsors were made per-
[675] sonally responsible. If the pupils acquitted themselves creditably, presents of *hohau* were
made to the teachers; if the youth failed, the tablets of the instructor were taken away"
(194, p. 245).

● 527 Besides the annual gathering and chanting by *rongorongo* men at Orongo
533 during the feast of the bird-man, these learned bards met once a year at Ana-
545 kenu to chant for the king. People came from all over the island to hear
them "read" from the tablets. This public "reading" must be considered as
a general contest between *rongorongo* men and a test of the ability of each.
[643] Visitors arrived with *huhu* (sticks with feathers) to which turmeric was tied,
293 as a courtesy to the king. The food to be consumed during the feast was
supplied by the king, who was aided by people of neighboring districts. Te
Haha described to Routledge (194, pp. 245-246) one such gathering, which he
attended in his youth:

Both King Nga-ara and his son, Kaimako . . . sat on seats made of tablets, and
each had a tablet in his hand; they wore feather hats, as did all the professors. The

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rongorongo men were arranged in rows, with an alley-way down the center to the Ariki. Some of them had brought with them one tablet only; others as many as four. The old ones read in turn, or sometimes two together, from the places where they stood, but their tablets were not inspected. Te Haha and his comrades stood on the outskirts, and he and one other lad held *mara* in their hands. If a young man failed, he was called up and his errors pointed out; but if an old man did not read well, Nga-ara would beckon to Te Haha, who would go up to the man and take him out by the ear. Our informant repeated this part of the story identically months later, and added that the Ariki would say to the culprit, "Are you not ashamed to be taken out by a child?" the offender's hat was taken away, but the tablet was not inspected.

The entire morning was spent in hearing one half of the men read; there was an interval at midday for a meal, after which the remainder recited, the whole performance lasting till evening. Fights occasionally ensued from people scoffing at those who failed. Nga-ara would then call Te Haha's attention to it, and the boy would go up to the offenders with the *mara* in his hand and look at them, when they would stop and there would be no more noise. When the function was over, the Ariki stood on a platform borne by eight men and addressed the *rongorongo* men on their duties, and doing well, and gave them each a chicken. Another old man, Jotefa, gave a different account of the great assembly, by which the Ariki sat on his stoop and the old men stood before him and prayed; according to this version they either did not bring their tablets or their doing so was voluntary. In addition to the great day, there were minor assemblies at new moon, or the last quarter of the moon, when the *rongorongo* men came to Anakena. The Ariki walked up and down reading the tablets, while the old men stood in a body and looked on.

In conformance with his supervisory duties Nga-ara is said to have traveled round the island and to have stayed for some while with the experts in each district. Routledge (194, p. 246) heard of a man of the south coast who was considered to be "too big a man to have a school." He also went about visiting and inspecting schools.

Tradition states that when Nga-ara died his body was carried to the ahu on three tablets, followed by the *rongorongo* men. The tablets were buried with him.

The *tangata rongorongo* of Easter Island are better understood when compared with those of the Marquesas and of Mangareva. In the Marquesas the *tuhuna o'ono* was "master chanter, tribal bard, or ceremonial priest, who presided in all important ritual, and served as repository and teacher of sacred and traditional lore" (104, p. 145). He was also the teacher of sacred chants and director of chanting at family feasts. The word *o'ono* is the equivalent of *rongo* since in the Marquesan dialect the *r* is dropped and the nasal velar (*ng*) becomes *n*. In the Marquesas there were tests of the *tuhuna o'ono* by other members of the same profession and contests between *tuhuna o'ono* of different tribes (104, p. 229). Any *tuhuna* who was judged in error by a majority of the masters gathered was immediately deprived of his title and could never lay claim to it again.

On Mangareva also there was a class of chanters or "intellectuals" who were termed *rongorongo* (*taura rongorongo*). They were not priests, properly speaking, but were responsible for the sacred chants for important

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he called to the old woman, ' Look, there are men at your house !' 539
So she put out her long arm to seize what she thought were the people going to rob her hut, whereon the man seized the paddle and brought it down on her arm and broke it ; then he killed the old woman and threw her body into the sea.

Life was by no means dull in Easter Island, for if a feast was not being given to commemorate a departed relation, it was arranged in honour of one whilst still alive. The "PAINA," which means simply picture or representation, was given by the family as a testimonial of esteem to a father, or possibly a brother who might be either alive or dead ; it was a serious matter, and the original direction for the celebration came from a supernaturally gifted individual known as an "ivi-atua." The paina was a large figure made of woven rods, and the host would clamber up inside it and look through eyes or mouth ; it had a crown made of the wings of a particular sea-bird, known as "makohe," and long ears. Occasionally it was put up on a special spot, where, for example, a man had been killed, but the interesting point in connection with the paina is that the usual place for erection was in front of an image ahu on its landward side, and at most, or all, of the large ahu, there can still be seen, in the grass at the foot of the paved slope, the holes where the paina have stood. It was kept in place by four long ropes, one of which passed over the ahu. The feast was held in the summer, and lasted from two to four days ; at any given ahu there might be only one in the season or as many as five. The drawbacks, which would have seemed obvious to such a locality, do not seem to have clouded the entertainment ; the feasting was great, and consisted largely of rats which were caught in the hen-houses. The recollection of these entertainments and the crowds who attended them were very vivid, and Viriamo's eyes brightened as she told of the singing, dancing, and feasting of her youth. 527 778 [224]

There are records of another figure which appears to have been different from the paina ; it was clothed and known as "KO PEKA." The Spanish Expedition in 1770 says that the islanders brought down to the beach, on the day when the three crosses were set up, an idol about 11 feet high like a "Judas," stuffed with straw ; it was all white, and had a fringe of black hair hanging down its back. They put it up on stones and sat

527 cross-legged around it, howling all night by the light of flares.
 778 As no information was volunteered to us about such celebrations, the natives were asked if they had ever known a similar figure, and an old man at once replied that there had existed one just like the description, made of reeds, as a memorial of a dead wife or "fine" child; it stood in front of the house, or was sometimes carried to a hillock where the people assembled to mourn. One of the officers of the La Pérouse Expedition also described a figure seen near a platform; it was 11 feet in height, clothed in white tapa ("*Hoffe blanche du pays*"); it had hanging round the neck a basket covered with white, and by the side of this bag the figure of a child 2 feet long. This seems to confirm the information that it was intended to represent a woman.

527 Another great festivity, given for a father either living or dead, was the "KORO." This was a house-party on a very extended scale. A special dwelling made with poles and thatched was put up, and, according to accounts, which surrround it no doubt with a halo from the past, measured some hundreds of feet in length and 20 feet in height. An old man stated that at a celebration at which he was present there were "a hundred guests," a number which is probably a guess, but the addition that there were "ten cooking-places" sounds like memory. Invitations to these festivities were much in request, as there was

[431] "no work to do"; presents of food were brought to the hero who distributed them to the party. They seem to have lasted indefinitely, going on for months, and the time was passed with various entertainments. The old people sang, the young people danced, and the host, who lived in a little house near, came and looked on. On the last day there was a great feast, and the house was broken down with the aid of the carved wooden lizards, which are associated with the island (fig. 117). We were puzzled in coming across a rough stone building, near Anakena, which seemed to be neither ahu, dwelling, nor chicken-house; it had been, the men told us, a shelter for the posts of the koro, where they were kept in readiness for the next celebration.

527 There was yet another entertainment which is said to have
 535 been in honour of a mother, as a koro was of a father. In at
 345 least four different places on the island are to be seen a dancing-ground known as "KAUNGA." It is a narrow strip paved with pebbles, over 200 feet in length by 2 feet in width, and not

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unlike the paved approach to some of the ahu. A demonstration was given of the way it was used. The dancers, "fine men, fine women," as was explained with emphasis, proceeding along it single file, holding rapa in both hands. In connection with some or all of the kaunga there was a house where the party remained indoors for a long time previous to the dances, in order to "get their complexions good," a touch which shows that a white skin was admired. 527 ●
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These feasts were held in certain months only, determined by the appearance of the heavens after nightfall. On the extremity of the eastern headland there is an outcrop of boulders, one of which is incised with a spiral design; the place is known as "Ko Te Papa-ui-hetun," or, "The Rock-for-seeing-stars," and here the old men came to watch the constellations. About two hundred yards from these boulders there is another engraved stone on which ten cup-shaped depressions are visible; this represented, it is said, "a map of the stars." 527
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The season for the Paina depended on the position of the three central stars of Orion, with regard to which the following story is related. A certain married woman, on going down to bathe, was carried off by a stranger. When her husband discovered this, he slew her in his anger, and she fled up to be a star. The husband then took their two boys, one in each hand, and followed her to the sky, where the three form the belt of Orion. The wife, however, would have nothing to do with them, and remained in a separate part of the heavens. This is the only nature myth which we encountered on the island. 821
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